



Intercollegiate Athletics Consulting
Rethink • Refocus • Recalibrate

**University of Memphis
Women's Basketball Program**

Assessment and Recommendations
September 2019

The following observations and recommendations regarding the University of Memphis Women's Basketball Program ("Program") have been compiled by *The PICTOR Group*. These were based on a review of materials provided by the University from May through August 2019 and through in-person and telephonic interviews with numerous individuals associated with the Program. Those interviewed on the current staff included the Head Coach of the Women's Basketball Program, members of the coaching staff, support staff members and the administrators working directly with the Program. Interviews also included a number of former women's basketball players and several former administrators or assistant coaches. The interviews took place between June 15 and July 31, 2019.

The Report that follows consists of two sections:

- 1) Issues or Concerns Identified and Observations
- 2) Recommendations regarding the Women's Basketball Program

Issues or Concerns Identified and Observations

A number of issues or concerns related to the Women's Basketball Program were identified and are summarized below in three general areas. Observations are included for each of the areas.

Culture of the Women's Basketball Program

Generally, there is a negative culture and atmosphere surrounding the Program. A number of former student-athletes reported having a poor experience and that the Head Coach's communication style and approach was not conducive to team-building and high performance. In addition, there has been a significant amount of turnover on the coaching staff in previous years, resulting in a lack of consistency in coaching support and teamwork. Lastly, some members of the support staff working with the Program expressed concern about communication with the Head Coach and her lack of respect for their role with the Program.

Concerns related to the culture of the Program have been manifested in the following manner:

- Head Coach's Communication with Student-athletes
 - Style and tone are intense and demanding
 - Insensitive comments that were viewed as inappropriate and demeaning
 - Perceived favoritism toward certain players
 - Lack of open dialogue with the team as a whole as well as one-on-one with individuals
 - The Women's Basketball Program has been in conflict as opposed to having a common focus
- Student-Athletes' Commitment to Program
 - Not willing to embrace requirements of a successful Division I Program
 - Lacking a clear understanding of training and practice expectations
 - Lack of open communication with the coaching staff and mutual respect
- Engagement of Women's Basketball coaching and support staff
 - Turnover of coaching staff has negatively impacted consistency, teamwork and respect
 - Head Coach's difficult or contentious relationship with support staff (e.g. athletic training, compliance)
 - Inconsistent role and engagement of the coaching staff with student-athletes, on and off the court
 - Associate and assistant coaches not serving as effective counterbalance to Head Coach's intensity and style

Key Observations:

1. Sharp division exists among staff as to whether the Head Coach is controlling and manipulative, or simply demanding and "old school" in her coaching style and approach. Equal division exists as to whether the Head Coach can change or is too set in her ways to do so. Conversely, several individuals indicated that some players were overly sensitive, too soft and not willing to commit to the demands of a Division I program.
2. Several members of the women's basketball staff and student-athletes referenced a lack of cultural sensitivity and awareness by the Head Coach. This manifests itself in inappropriate comments that are perceived as being insensitive or racist, although there does not seem to be ill intent on behalf of the Head Coach. Several players commented on demeaning and personal comments during practice and in front of other players and coaches. There were issues that were raised via the media and during interviews with student-athletes that were not within the scope of this review but have been referred to the Office for Institutional Equity for further review.
3. Team members want to be treated fairly and consistently whether they are a starter or bench player. Some individuals cited poor recruiting decisions by the Head Coach, then

favoritism or disregard toward certain student-athletes once they joined the Program. Several players commented that the Head Coach was encouraging and very positive during the recruiting process and then changed in her demeanor and approach once practices began.

4. Several individuals noted that the lack of a promised facility and delay with the Head Coach's contract extension could have been negative factors in recruiting.
5. There has been a lack of trust between the coaching staff and the compliance staff and other senior staff members. The women's basketball staff feels that student-athletes have been granted permission to circumvent the coaches and go directly to compliance with complaints (e.g. CARA and practice times). Some mentioned that one or more senior administrators behaved unprofessionally and shared sensitive information about the Head Coach's status and contract, which harmed the Program.

Administrative Support for the Program

The athletics administration has not provided the necessary support and direction for the women's basketball program in recent years. It appears that the relationship between the former Athletics Director and the Head Women's Basketball Coach deteriorated significantly due to promises that were made and not kept, and a lack of honesty and accountability. In addition, a number of changes took place at the senior administrator level (including the Senior Woman Administrator) that have diminished the oversight and communication with the Women's Basketball Program. Lastly, facility commitments for the Women's Basketball Program have fallen short of expectations.

Concerns related to administrative support have been exhibited in the following manner:

- Commitment from Athletics Administration
 - Head Coach does not have a direct reporting line to the Athletics Director
 - An experienced senior level administrator had not been assigned to support and assist with Program needs.
 - The Interim Senior Woman Administrator does not have the experience necessary to advocate, mentor and provide administrative support for women's basketball or other sport programs.
 - The communication between the Head Coach and former Athletics Director had not been open and honest. Commitments were made and not acted upon.
- Facility Commitments for Women's Basketball
 - Improvements to Elma Roane Fieldhouse as the competitive venue and a timeline for completion were not clearly communicated or acted upon.

- A plan and time frame for renovations to the practice facility have not been developed or implemented.
- The women's basketball office suite is not located in the same facility where the team practices and competes.

Key Observations:

1. There is an obvious disparity between the men's basketball practice facility and competitive venue and the Elma Roane Fieldhouse where the women's basketball team practices and competes.
2. The initial plan that the Laurie-Walton Family Basketball Center would house both the women and men's basketball teams was promoted by the Program to recruits as well as to current student-athletes and coaches. The decision that the Facility would only house men's basketball, without a viable and equitable facility plan for women's basketball, placed the program at a serious disadvantage. This decision, although outside the control of the Head Coach, diminished the Head Coach's credibility.
3. It was often mentioned that the coaches and current student-athletes feel they have been misled by the administration and senior staff, particularly as it relates to the practice and competition facilities. Promises were made that were not kept, which caused issues with morale, credibility and recruiting for the Women's Basketball Program.
4. Marketing and promotional efforts for the women's basketball program have not been carried out as planned or in an effective manner.
5. The delay in extending the head women's basketball coach's contract negatively impacted the credibility of the Head Coach and the overall morale surrounding the program.

Title IX/Gender Equity

The most recent Title IX/Gender Equity report was in 2017; however, the status of the recommendations included in the report is unclear. There are a number of major disparities between the men and women's basketball programs that need to be addressed to provide equitable services and amenities for the women's Program.

Concerns related to gender equity and the Women's Basketball Program are as follows:

- Facility improvements to practice and competitive venues and to the coaches' office space are not comparable to those provided for the men's basketball program.

- There is a staffing differential between women and men's basketball (e.g. men's basketball program has two additional positions--an Equipment Manager and a Director of Player Development).
- A competitive salary pool and incentives for the women's basketball coaching staff have not been maintained.
- The University's Title IX/Gender Equity Committee has not been actively engaged. The 2017 Gender Equity Report needs to be reviewed. Some issues identified in the Report have not been tracked or addressed. An updated Report with an action plan, monitoring and accountability appears to be lacking.

Key Observations:

1. Several individuals referenced the challenges associated with the women's basketball offices being geographically separate from where the student-athletes train, practice and compete. This is a disadvantage that restricts regular interaction and communication between the coaching staff and student-athletes on a daily basis.
2. There is a strong sense among the head and assistant women's basketball coaches that the athletic department is not committed to the Women's Basketball Program. This is manifested most directly in a comparison to men's basketball at almost every level, from facilities to staffing to amenities. This sense of a lack of commitment extends to the student-athletes, who don't feel that the Head Coach is fighting strongly enough on their behalf.

Recommendations Regarding the Women's Basketball Program

Recommendations for Program Management

Listed below are general recommendations intended to improve the culture of the Women's Basketball Program, to provide the necessary administrative support for the Head Women's Basketball Coach and the Program, and to address Title IX and Gender Equity issues related to the Program.

1. Engage the Office for Institutional Equity/Title IX and its director, Kenneth Anderson, to offer sensitivity and cultural competency training for the Head Coach and the entire staff. The goal is to improve awareness and communication, and to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect between coaches and student-athletes.

Fall 2019

2. Engage a consultant or sports psychologist to facilitate an on-going team-building program related to communication, respect, expectations and accountability for the entire Women's Basketball Program. Develop a mutual understanding between the student-athletes and coaching staff of the roles and expectations for a Division I program and promote buy-in from everyone associated with the Program. Determine whether the current sports psychologist is the correct individual to continue working with the team, or whether a new approach would be more productive.

Beginning in September 2019

3. Ensure that the Head Women's Basketball Coach has a direct reporting line to the Athletics Director with regular meetings, as well as a consistent reporting line to an experienced senior athletic administrator for Program and administrative support.

Beginning Immediately

4. The designated senior athletic administrator should work with the Head Coach to review management of and communication with staff, development of team policies and procedures, as well as the overall approach to recruitment, talent evaluation and decision-making. The senior athletic administrator or Athletics Director should meet with prospective student-athletes and their parents during on-campus official visits.

September 2019 and on-going

5. The senior athletic administrator overseeing the Women's Basketball Program should have a visible presence in and around the Program to be seen in a supportive role and to develop a rapport with the student-athletes and staff. This should include attending practices or team workouts on a regular basis, attending home games and travel with the women's team on a regular basis.

Beginning Immediately and on-going

6. Assess the compliance staff and evaluate whether the individual currently assigned to women's basketball is the best person to work effectively with the program. Consider adding or assigning a different individual if warranted.

September 2019

7. As soon as is practical and feasible create a women's basketball office suite in the Elma Roane Fieldhouse facility. The plans and timing for creating the office suite as well as other facility improvements should be in collaboration with and communicated to the entire Women's Basketball Program and could be a significant step in making all feel that the needs of the Program are a priority.

Fall 2019

8. The interim or new Athletics Director, Deputy Athletics Director and Senior Women Administrator should meet with the women's basketball team and staff early in the fall semester. Senior administration should make clear that the Head Coach has its full support and that the student-athletes and Program will be given the tools and resources to be successful.

Fall 2019

9. The Committee on Title IX and Gender Equity should be activated as soon as possible with representatives from within the athletics department and University personnel. The internal gender equity review that was conducted in 2017 should be reviewed to determine what issues have been addressed and those that remain. Follow-up should ensure that there is a *Gender Equity Plan* in place to remedy any deficiencies in a timely manner. Fall 2019
10. Establish benchmarks and performance standards for the Head Women's Basketball Coach to meet. These should include clearly defined performance indicators that are both quantitative and qualitative and a timeframe for review. Quarterly meetings should take place between the Head Coach, the Athletics Director and senior level administrator working directly with the Program to review progress toward the benchmarks and performance standards. September 2019 and on-going
11. Develop a methodology for informal and formal interviews with student-athletes to assess their experience as a member of the women's basketball team. Utilize a tool to distribute a survey to all women's basketball student-athletes twice a year (December and April) to receive direct feedback about their experience. Fall 2019

Recommendations for Head Coach Performance

Below are a series of recommended performance expectations for the Head Women's Basketball Coach. The Head Coach should take the initiative to provide a report on these activities to the senior athletic administrator on a regular and timely basis.

1. Meet weekly with the senior athletic administrator overseeing the Program. Provide updates on student-athlete and team development and concerns related to the coaching or support staff. Agree upon the appropriate course of action and provide a written summary of actions taken. Beginning September 2019
2. Review team policies and procedures, and expectations of the women's basketball team with the senior athletic administrator overseeing the Program. Provide a written or electronic copy of the team handbook to each student-athlete, coach and member of the support staff working with the Program. Include a listing of all senior level athletic administrators and contact information as part of the team handbook. September 2019
3. Collaborate with the compliance staff person assigned to the Program to provide student-athletes, managers, coaches and all members of the women's basketball support staff with the NCAA definition of Countable Athletic-Related Activities (CARA). Establish a procedure for players, coaches and compliance staff to verify the number of hours/week spent on CARA. September 2019

4. Discuss a procedure for selecting team captains with the senior athletic administrator and communicate the procedure to the team members. Clearly define the role and expectation of the team captains and communicate their role to all concerned. Meet weekly with team captains to discuss team needs and solicit input from the student-athletes' perspective.

Beginning September 2019 and on-going through basketball season

5. Conduct weekly meetings with the coaching staff to create a culture of open dialogue and teamwork. Seek feedback from associate and assistant coaches regarding needs of the team and individual student-athletes, and input on the weekly practice, travel and competitive schedule. *Beginning immediately and on-going through academic year*

6. Take the initiative to engage the women's basketball team and staff in a team-building program with a consultant or sport psychologist. Seek candid feedback from the consultant regarding the Head Coaches' communication style and management of the team to build a positive team culture. *Beginning September 2019*

7. Establish a culture of striving for excellence by ALL team members, from the Head Coach to players to managers to support staff. Benchmark team goals for both on the court as well as in the classroom and with community service/engagement. *October 2019*

8. Establish positive reinforcement barometers for the team as well as for individuals (e.g. best effort at practice, best defensive effort during a game, most improved by month). These goals can be competitive but always positive and clearly communicated. *October 2019*

9. Maintain a log of all meetings between the Head Coach with the women's basketball team, individual student-athletes, with the coaching staff and support staff members. The log should include date, time, attendees and a list of major topics of discussion. The log is to be shared with the senior athletic administrator on a monthly basis.

Beginning September 2019 and on-going

10. Improve upon the 2018-19 overall team won-loss record, as well as in American Athletic Conference competition during the 2019-20 season. *2019-20 Season*

11. Create a structure and culture to achieve a team graduation point average (GPA) of 3.0 or better during each semester and for each academic year. *2019-20 Season*

12. Improve upon the retention and eligibility rate of the Women's Basketball Program. Benchmark the team's APR with the other women's basketball programs consistently finishing in the top half of the American Athletic Conference.

Beginning with the 2019-20 Season

13. Take proactive steps to maintain open communication and create a positive working relationship with staff members who provide support services for the Program (e.g., athletic training, compliance, strength training, academic services). 2019 Fall semester

Lastly, it is strongly recommended that an executive coach be engaged to serve as a confidential mentor and advisor for the Head Coach beginning as soon as possible and continuing through spring 2020. Ideally, the executive coach should be someone who has been a Head Coach of a Division I program and is skilled in mentoring and coaching others. Selection of the individual should be mutually acceptable to the Head Coach and senior athletics administrator or Athletics Director.